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SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON AL-JĀḤIẒ'S NOTIONS OF ṬAB' AND ṬIBĀ' (INNATE DISPOSITIONS)

Zaid Alamiri*

Abstract: This study sheds some light on how the philosophical and theological beliefs of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868), as a Mu'tazilite, influenced his literary views and opinions. Among these are the concepts of Ṭab' and Ṭibā', which are frequently mentioned in his writings. The concepts of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' originally address philosophically related theological questions, which were extended to cover literary points. On the theological level, these concepts were used to support the Mu'tazilah's interpretation of human free will viewed in light of their belief in the unicity and justice of God. The notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' arose out of the Mu'tazilah's discussion of 'generated acts'. Regarding the literary domain, al-Jāḥiẓ applied the concepts of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' to the interpretation of *littérateur* creativity and his literary production. The way al-Jāḥiẓ interpreted the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' displays natural determinism disguised under Divine determinism.

Keywords: *Ṭab', Ṭibā', innate disposition, generated acts, al-Jāḥiẓ, determinism, literary production*

INTRODUCTION

The Mu'tazilah are generally known as partisans of divine unity and divine justice. These two propositions advocate the primacy of the absolute sovereignty of God on the one hand and human free will (and intellect) on the other hand. However, the propositions conflict because the vindication of human free will opposes the absolute sovereignty of God and limits His power. To resolve this contradiction, the Mu'tazilah came up with notions of 'the generated acts' and 'Ṭab'. In doing so, the Mu'tazilah sought to safeguard the absolute sovereignty of God and simultaneously maintain His justice. Therein lies the genius of the Mu'tazilah as true intellectuals and they built their 'rationalism' on this.

This study carefully examines the notions of Ṭab' (طبع)¹ and its cognates, in particular Ṭibā' (طبائع), through which al-Jāḥiẓ expresses his religious–philosophical and literary views and

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¹ Ṭab', which literally means seal, stamp and impress, can generally be rendered into English as nature, innate disposition or propensity. Its general meaning in Arabic overlaps with other terms such as *xuluq* (خُلُق), *salīqa* (سَلِيْقَة), *ḡarīza* (غَرِيْزَة) and *sajjiyya* (سَجِيَّة). Its elaboration here, as employed by al-Jāḥiẓ, is more related to philosophical connotations than others. For further information, see: David E. Pingree and Syed Nomanul Haq, "ṬABĪ' A", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. P. J. Bearman, T. H. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (Brill: Leiden, 2000), vol. 10, 25-28.

concepts. Al-Jāḥiẓ's writings cover a wide range of topics, where the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' are discussed in relation to points of belief, knowledge, human moral responsibility and God's justice and sovereignty, on one hand, and literary production on the other. In other words, al-Jāḥiẓ applies the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' in expounding his philosophical and literary concepts. The former (i.e. philosophical concepts) falls under the Mu'tazilah general elaboration of people's responsibility for their acts viewed from the propositions of God's justice and unicity. The latter (i.e. literary views), however, refers to the two most salient aspects of the creativity of the *littérateur*, and the spontaneity and extemporaneity of speech production. It is essential to highlight that al-Jāḥiẓ's views, without doubt, express and reflect his Mu'tazilite affiliation apparent in his literary and non-literary opinions alike.²

In this regard, to the best of my knowledge, few studies address and elaborate on this subject. Furthermore, the little that exists, particularly in Arabic, lacks clarity and is sometimes confusing, if not biased, where the religious aspect is dominant at the expense of other aspects. Having explained that, from the outset, this study stands as a general exposition, looking only at some elements of the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā'.

THE ORIGIN OF ṬAB' AND ṬIBĀ'

From the Mu'tazilah discussion on human free will and their responsibility for their acts, the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' emerged. These notions denote a meaningful connection and an implicit relationship between the different yet related points of knowledge, capacity to act and belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. That is, there is a connection between knowledge and belief on one hand and, on the other hand, a relationship of knowledge to human capacity and free will.³ As mentioned earlier, the notion of Ṭab' emerged from a discussion on the generated acts, so a brief account of the generated acts is necessary.⁴ Simply explained, the generated acts are those acts produced by human will (i.e. within the inward world of will). As such, they express the causal relationship between the doer's action and the deed.⁵ In introducing this concept, the Mu'tazilah sought to unequivocally establish the agent of the generated effects: is it the same as a human's acts within themselves?⁶

² Wadī' a Ṭāhā an-Najm, *al-Jāḥiẓ wa an-naqd al-'Adabī [al-Jāḥiẓ and the literary criticism]* (Kuwait: Kuwait University, 1988), 29. Also, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Rāḍī, *Al-'Ab'ād al-Falsafiyah wa-l kalāmiyah Fi al-Firk al-Balāghī wa l-naqdī 'Anda al-Jāḥiẓ* [The Philosophical and Dialectical Perspectives of the Rhetorical and Critical Thought of al-Jāḥiẓ] (Cairo: Edition al-Adab, 2006), 289.

³ This relation can be traced back to Ghaylān, who argued that belief in God is the second knowledge. See Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Al-'Itijāh al-'Aqlī Fi at-Tafsīr: Dirāsah Fi Qaḍiat al-Majāz 'Anda al-Mu'tazilah* [The Rational trend of the Exegesis: A Study on the Mu'tazilah Concept of Metaphor in the Qur'ān], 4th ed. (Casa Blanca, Beirut: Al-Markaz at-Ṭaqāfī al-'Arabi, 1998), 47.

⁴ Their interpretation of these generated acts shows the subtle differences belonging to the Mu'tazilah.

⁵ Majid Fakhry, *A Short History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 49.

⁶ Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1976), 655.

Historically speaking, Bišr b. al-Mu‘tamir (d. 825) is considered the Mu‘tazilite who originated the notion of the generated acts.⁷ He maintains that acts, which originate from causes proceeding from us (as their conscious agents),⁸ are our acts. The second was Abū l-Hudayl al-‘Allāf (d. 841), who modified Bišr’s interpretation of the generated acts and divided them into those acts whose modalities are known and those which are not.⁹ Viewed from this point, a person is the author of their own acts, since they know their modalities and consequently is responsible.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the acts one cannot observe or scrutinise must be attributed to God;¹¹ therefore, a person is not responsible for them. An example of the former is the flight of an arrow or the sound caused by the impact of two solid objects. The latter covers all that is included in acts of “pleasure and colours and tastes and smells, heat and cold, wetness and dryness, cowardice and courage, hunger and satiety, and comprehension and knowledge occurring in another by his act.”¹²

Then, at the hands of an-Nazzām (d. 845), the generated acts received their innovative interpretation that led to the emergence of the notions of Ṭab‘ and Ṭibā‘. Influenced by Mu‘ammar b. ‘Abbād (d. 830), the first who postulated the idea of Ṭibā‘ and pushed it to its logical limit,¹³ an-Nazzām stated “that which occurs outside the range of man is the act of God by the necessitation of a natural disposition possessed by a thing (بإيجاب الخلقة);”¹⁴ that is, by the necessitation of Ṭab‘. The idea of Ṭab‘ constitutes part of an-Nazzām’s philosophical formation of believing in the perception of senses as well as his scientific rational orientation.¹⁵

⁷ As reported by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm as-Šahrastānī, *Milal wa Niḥal* [The Book of Sects and Creeds], ed. M. S. Kaylānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1975), 1, 64; ‘Abd al-Qahir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* [Moslem Schisms and Sects], ed. M. M. ‘Abd al-Ḥamid (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-‘Ašriya, 1995), 157.

⁸ Between parentheses is Wolfson’s addition so as to be consistent with the other half of Bišr’s view, which holds that these generated acts are the direct creation of God, if their causes are not proceeding from man. Thus, as-Šahrastānī and al-Baghdādī misinterpreted Bišr – Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 646; Abad al-Sattār ar-Rāwī, *Tawrat al-‘aql* [The Revolution of Reason] (Baghdad: Dār aš-Šūn at-Ṭaqāfiya al-‘āma Wazārt at-Ṭaqāfa wa l-‘Ilām, 1986), 114-117.

⁹ Majid Fakhry believes “Abu-l Hudayl’s motive is very likely to ward off one of the charges which the anti-Mu‘tazilite polemicists directed against their notion of man “as the creator of his deeds”. Majid Fakhry, “Some Paradoxical Implications of the Mu‘tazilite View of Free Will,” *The Muslim World* 43, no. 2 (1954): 98-99. See also, Nasr Ḥamid Abu Zayd, *Al-‘Itijāh al-‘Aqli*, 49-50.

¹⁰ Francis E. Peters, *Aristotle and Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 144.

¹¹ Fakhry, *A Short History of Islamic Philosophy*, 50.

¹² Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 648.

¹³ Mu‘ammar maintained that “generated effects and whatever abides in bodies ... are each the act of the body in which it abides by the nature of that body.” Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 649. Majid Fakhry states Mu‘ammar’s motive in following this notion of Ṭab‘ (or Ṭibā‘) to its logical consequence was obviously the desire to relieve God completely of any responsibility for evil in the world. Fakhry, *Some Paradoxical Implications*, 102. For more, see Peters, *Aristotle and Arabs*, 144; Abu Zayd, *Al-‘Itijāh al-‘Aqli*, 49-50.

¹⁴ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 649. The new element an-Nazzām introduced is that the nature in bodies acts under the supervision of God.

¹⁵ His natural interest in animal’s natural dispositions was unfolded completely in his student book al-Ḥayawān – Muḥammad ‘Abd l-Ḥādī Abū Reedah, *Ibrāhīm bin Sayyār an-Nazzām wa ‘an-Nazz al-Kalāmiyah wa l-Falsafiyah* [Ibrāhīm bin Sayyār an-Nazzām: His Theological and Philosophical Thoughts] (Cairo: Lajnat at-t’alif, wa-t-Tarjamah wa-n-našr Abū Reedah, 1946), 48-51, 53, 68.

al-Jāḥiẓ's Elaboration of Ṭab'

Generally speaking, al-Jāḥiẓ's interpretation of the notion of Ṭab' is not much different from that of his mentor, an-Nazzām. Before elaborating on its theoretical basis, it is important to mention something about the use of this term and its related cognates in his writings. The following table shows the frequency of these terms in four of his famous books.¹⁶

Table 1: Frequency of the terms of Ṭab' and its related cognates in four of al-Jāḥiẓ's books

Word	Book			
	al-Ḥayawān	al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn	al-Bukhala	ar-Rasā'il
Ṭab' (طبع)	17	6	4	11
Ṭibā' (طباع)	21	2	9	13
Ṭabā'i' (طبايع)	25	1	5	23
Ṭabi'a (طبيعة)	33	7	1	32

From this table, it follows that al-Ḥayawān and ar-Rasā'il, in which al-Jāḥiẓ discussed different and variant topics, the frequency of and consequently space devoted to the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' are higher than in other writings. Relevant to the terms of Ṭab' and Ṭibā', al-Jāḥiẓ frequently used a closely related term, pregnant with religious connotations, called Tasxir (التسخير). Its frequency, however, is not significantly high compared to that of Ṭab' and Ṭibā', as it is mentioned 21 times in the four books.

In interpreting the generated acts, al-Jāḥiẓ holds that “no act proceeds from man by choice except the act of willing; and whatever is after the act of willing is [the act] of man by his Ṭab' and is not by choice.”¹⁷ This means a person is imprinted by their Ṭab' in doing acts other than the act of willing. Al-Jāḥiẓ arrived at this result after having seen that

attributing knowledge to God infringes the notion of human capacity (free will), a notion considered by al-Jāḥiẓ himself the foundation of the existence of intellect & knowledge. Therefore, he had to resort to the notion of Ṭibā' or Ṭabā'i', as his teacher did, to solve this contradiction.¹⁸

This statement taken at face value reveals al-Jāḥiẓ's inclination to natural philosophy.¹⁹

¹⁶ These terms are also mentioned in other works. Except for “al-Biḡāl” and at-Tāj Fi Axlāq al-Mülūk, in which Ṭab' and Ṭibā' are mentioned seven and two times for the former and three and two times for the latter, the frequency of these terms is not statistically significant in Kitāb al-Būrṣān, al-Umyān and al-Urjān, for example.

¹⁷ This idea is shared by Ṭumāmah b. Aṣras (d. 828), who is apparently influenced by Mu'ammār, teacher of Bīṣr b. al-Mu'tamir (d. 825). Like al-Jāḥiẓ, Ṭumāmah held the same view that “man's only act is willing; however, he maintained that generated acts happen without an agent and they are attributed to man only by analogy” (qiyās). Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*.

¹⁸ Abu Zayd, *Al-Itijāh al-'Aqlī*, 51.

¹⁹ aṣ-Šahrastānī, *Milal wa Niḥal*, 1:75. The names of some naturalist philosophers, like Democritus and Galen, are frequently mentioned in al-Jāḥiẓ's books (For example, Abū 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 7th ed., ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1998), vol. 3, 27; Abū 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 2nd ed., ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Cairo: šarikat Maktabat wa Maṭba'at Mustafā al-Bābī

Because of that, and before going into the details of the Ṭabʿ notion, I emphasise that al-Jāḥiẓ, concerned about the confusion and misunderstandings that often arise from presenting new notions, set out to demonstrate there is no contradiction between philosophy and scholastic theology (Kalām). In other words, he sought to reconcile between the absolute sovereignty of God and God's justice, as mentioned earlier. Aware of this problem, al-Jāḥiẓ pointed out:

the person involved in theology will not be qualified in his specialty if he does not have an equal understanding of religion and philosophy; the knowledgeable person is the one who unites them; furthermore the efficient person is the one who combines the belief in the unicity of Allah with the belief of attributing to the Ṭibāʿ what corresponds to them in relation to the acts of man.²⁰

To make this point explicit, al-Jāḥiẓ went on to say,

whoever claims that belief in unicity of Allah is incomplete unless belief in the Ṭabʿ & Ṭibāʿ is eliminated, does not really understand the meaning of Allah unicity; similarly, if someone claims that belief in the Ṭibāʿ, when combined with unicity of Allah, cannot be achieved, he also misinterprets the meaning of the Ṭibāʿ. If your strong emphasis on Allah unicity does not ignore the true roles of the Ṭibāʿ, the unbeliever then becomes dishearten and loses hope.²¹

Recognising the difficulty of combining these two concepts (i.e. Allah's unicity and belief in Ṭibāʿ), he affirmed: "[I swear] by my life, there is a certain difficulty in combining them; but, whenever I elaborate an essay and find it highly ambiguous, I take refuge in Allah that I would revoke any part of it."²²

Since the terminology of Ṭabʿ and Ṭibāʿ was new in circulation and could be considered related to foreign sources, al-Jāḥiẓ, I believe, took advantage of the situation to warn against the difficulty of understanding translated philosophical and scientific texts in general and the religious in particular.²³ Such misunderstanding of al-Jāḥiẓ's interpretation of Ṭabʿ and Ṭibāʿ is frequently found in the writings of non-Muʿtazilite scholars of Kalām.²⁴

al-Ḥalabī wa awlādūhū bi Miṣr, 1965), vol. 1, 101; Abū ʿUthman ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasāʾil*, ed. ʿA. M. Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964), vol. 3, 315).

²⁰ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 2, 124.

²¹ Ibid., 266.

²² Ibid., 134-135.

²³ "That is our opinion regarding the texts of geometry ... how would be then the case of a translator with regard to texts of religion and divinity dealing with what may be attributed to Allah and what may be not. And given this situation, how a translator manages to explain the concepts of natural dispositions in a way to be compatible with the unity of God." al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 1, 77. Typically for al-Jāḥiẓ, he digressed here to comment on a previous paragraph that talked about the qualifications of a translator of philosophical works.

²⁴ Even the Muʿtazilites criticised him. aṣ-Ṣahrastānī, *Milal Wa Nihal*, 1, 75.

ṬIBĀ': SOCIAL HUMAN NEEDS AND LITERARY PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVES

Social Human Needs

In discussing the notion of Ṭibā', al-Jāḥiẓ approaches it from two perspectives: social and literary. Regarding the social perspective, though it has not been elaborated in detail, al-Jāḥiẓ drives home the point that the variations of Ṭibā' are a perquisite, determined by God, for society's existence and survival. Understood as such, the variation of human needs reflects the variation in Ṭibā'. Included in this exposition is al-Jāḥiẓ's theological belief, which consists of two connected elements. The first refers to the deterministic aspect of the Ṭibā' variation and the second to the purpose of this variation aimed principally at the benefit of human beings in terms of maintaining harmony and coexistence in human society.²⁵

In exposing his views on the Ṭibā' variation, al-Jāḥiẓ makes general comments, discussed in some detail, particularly in *ar-Rasā'il*.²⁶ For example, al-Jāḥiẓ maintains that God provides a community and nation with the means to achieve a remarkable position in crafts, and He favours others to stand out from the rest in eloquence or literature.²⁷ This point is further discussed and emphasised in various places of his *ar-Rasā'il* as well as in *al-Ḥayawān* and *al-Bayān*.²⁸ All these texts, so to speak, highlight that variation in Ṭibā' contributes to differences in skill-based careers that finally contribute to managing human needs. Therefore, satisfying these different needs produces harmony in society. This variation, al-Jāḥiẓ argues, is a product of God's intervention (i.e. determinism) in directing

people to do different things, designated for their benefit, without being compelled or summoned; otherwise social resources stand little chance of reaching all members of society because "if all people detest working in farming, livelihoods would cease to exist, and if all people despise working in weaving industry, then we would all be naked."²⁹

However, variation in Ṭibā' is not limited to direct and basic social needs; it extends to cover other areas. For example, God provided wise men and scholars with the Ṭibā' necessary to achieve such status, in the sense that God liked that a person naturally interested in knowledge (i.e. having a propensity) would become a scholar, and similarly he liked the one who leaned

²⁵ This is taken within the general Mu'tazilah understanding of God's justice that He does not commit the vices and this does not contradict their understanding of His absolute sovereignty.

²⁶ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā'il*, vol. 1, 67-71, 197, 102-103, 105, 110, 144-145; vol. 3, 236, 238-239, 240, 242-250. This was also discussed in al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 1, 141, 201-207, and al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, 1: 280. These reflect passing comments that hint to such notions without further elaboration but one can, of course, deduce their general connotations.

²⁷ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā'il*, vol. 1, 67.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 68-71, 97, 102-103, 105-110, 144-145; vol. 3, 236-250; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 1, 141, 201-207; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 208.

²⁹ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā'il*, vol. 3, 242. Al-Jāḥiẓ sees the necessity of labour division and specialisation in human society – al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 1, 42-44; vol. 2, 147. However, he adopts an opposite stance as to that of theoretical knowledge in general – Wadī'a Ṭāḥā an-Najm, "Studies on the Writings of al-Jāḥiẓ" (PhD diss., University of London, 1958), 72-75; Wadī'a Ṭāḥā an-Najm, *al-Jāḥiẓ wal Ḥāḍirah al-'Abāssiyyah* [al-Jāḥiẓ and Abbasid City Life] (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-'Iršād, 1965), 46-47.

towards philosophy to be a philosopher.³⁰ Central to this is al-Jāḥiẓ's viewpoint that these divine-driven Ṭibā' given to humans are applicable in the animate and inanimate worlds alike as "in the same way that God had willed that the lion to leap; He willed the steel to cut and the poison to kill, and the food to sustain the life of individual."³¹ Such an understanding suggests a deterministic aspect of the notions of Ṭab' and Ṭibā', a point that will be touched on shortly.

Role of Knowledge and Ṭibā' in Human Needs

Knowledge, as explained previously, is an act that occurs by the Ṭibā' created by God; thus, it has a noticeable position in the interpretation of Ṭab' and Ṭibā'. Al-Jāḥiẓ's analysis of the relation between knowledge, capacity and Ṭibā' is not, in general terms, very different from his mentor.³²

The human being, al-Jāḥiẓ argues, differs from other animals by virtue of possessing the intellect (recursive reason), a faculty that distinguishes humans from other creatures. To make his point more explicit, al-Jāḥiẓ states that what makes human being worthy of the divine favours is not related to the outward form or to the upright position that freed man's hands to be used in different uses. All people, al-Jāḥiẓ argues, including the disabled, insane, children and idiots, possess these physical characteristics. The difference lies rather in the existence of capacity (to act) and power. The capacity, in turn, entails the existence of reason and knowledge; both, however, do not entail the existence of capacity.³³ It follows that intellect depends on the capacity, which implies knowledge is a product of this dependence in a way that the lack of power and capacity renders the intellect ineffectual, which leads to the destruction of the knowledge foundation. Viewed from this perspective, capacity is the basis for the existence of intellect that leads to the existence of knowledge.³⁴

Despite that, al-Jāḥiẓ associates knowledge and intellect with human needs that vary with age. The following anecdote, quoted by al-Jāḥiẓ, explains how knowledge serves human needs:

a wise man was asked, when you got full growth of reason? He replied: from the moment I am brought into the world. Seeing how perplexed his audience was, by this statement, he explained: I cried when I felt fear. I asked for food when I felt hungry. I searched for the breast when I felt the need for it, and I calmed down when I felt satisfied. The wise man added: these were the measures of my needs. And whoever knows the measures of his needs in their both cases of permission and prohibition, no need then at that time to more than that type of intellect (i.e., knowledge).³⁵

³⁰ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā'il*, vol. 3, 239.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Abu Zayd, *Al-'Itijāh al-'Aqli*, 50.

³³ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, vol. 5, 542-543.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

This means the ‘knowledgeabilities’³⁶ of a child (which al-Jāhiz calls the intellect) are determined by their biological and natural needs. That is, the sense and feeling of what that child needs and requires.³⁷

What has been stated so far refers to the needs of the individual. So, what about the community’s needs? Al-Jāhiz maintains the needs of the community are not biologically limited like that of the child (i.e. the individual); rather, they undergo change and development. This fact (of change and development) entails, therefore, the existence of new means whose function is to assist humans to know and recognise their two worlds – the (natural) environment and the (human) society – then proceed to know the ‘invisible’ world that results in knowing God who did all that in the universe at the service of humans.³⁸

Starting from the inexorable necessity of knowledge for the existence of human society, human knowledge passes from a basic level of existence based on differentiating between bad and good to an elevated level to achieve human happiness. This means human beings proceed from senses-based knowledge to intellect-based knowledge in such a way that “what satisfies their needs (i.e. human) would be a type of learning and act that lead them to a permanent rewarding for good deeds and a deliverance from severe punishment.”³⁹

Since attributing knowledge to God infringes the notion of human capacity, a notion considered by al-Jāhiz as the foundation of the existence of intellect and knowledge, al-Jāhiz sought to solve this contradiction by resorting to the notion of Ṭibā‘ or Ṭabā‘i‘ to which his teacher resorted. So, al-Jāhiz held the view that “knowledge (al-Ma‘ārif) all are necessary by nature. And nothing of that belongs to man’s acts; man only act is the will and his acts occur naturally.”⁴⁰

Tasxir (التسخير): A Disguised Determinism

I mentioned earlier that variation of Ṭibā‘ or Ṭabā‘i‘, aimed at serving variation of human needs, carries deterministic connotations as a result of its association with religious thought. This is evident in the use, as stated earlier, of Tasxir, a term replete with nuances of determinism.⁴¹

³⁶ al-Ma‘ārif (plural of al-Ma‘ārif), in general terms, means what is known about things in terms of information and data acquired. The term overlaps with ‘ilm, normally rendered into English as knowledge. The two terms are interchangeable. As English does not have a plural of knowledge, like the Arabic ‘al-Ma‘ārif’ or Spanish ‘conocimientos’, the term was adopted here, as a linguistic ‘*ijtihad*’, to express roughly the meaning of the Arabic ‘al-Ma‘ārif’. For more, see Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Brill: Leiden, 2007), 1-2, 41, 53, 115-117.

³⁷ Abu Zayd, *Al-’Itijāh al-’Aqli*, 50.

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

³⁹ al-Jāhiz, *Al-Hayawān*, vol. 2, 116.

⁴⁰ Abu Zayd, *Al-’Itijāh al-’Aqli*, 51.

⁴¹ In page 35, I mentioned that al-Jāhiz frequently uses the term Tasxir (التسخير), which overlaps with the Ṭab‘, and this overlap brings to mind the concept of determinism. As determinism is a wide topic, I, for different reasons, limit myself to touch briefly on some points relevant to my study. Do the notions of Ṭab‘ and Ṭibā‘ carry connotations of natural (or scientific) determinism, so to speak? Roughly speaking, the ‘generated effects’, from which the notion of Ṭab‘ originated, suggest such understanding. It is held the notion of Ṭibā‘ is almost a synonymy of scientific determinism and has the core of that determinism or at least some of its

So, what is Tasxir?

Tasxir, as elaborated by al-Jāḥiẓ, is derived from and based on the principle of “divine guidance.”⁴² This means God wills nothing but that which is good for people in the sense that He benefits people by guiding them towards what they like and towards what He wishes them to do without being forced or called for.⁴³

Tasxir, if carefully examined and analysed, means nothing more than meeting and satisfying human needs with the purpose of benefiting them. It is because the word benefit encompasses all the needs of daily life important for the survival of human society insofar as it promotes people’s peaceful coexistence despite being different in their Ṭibā’ because “the Tasxir caused them to pursue the course to the end of contentedness and certainty.”⁴⁴ That is, the differences are the source on which divine guidance (Tasxir) works to bring about harmony in human society. It follows there is an association, as one can construe from al-Jāḥiẓ’s analysis, between Tasxir (divine guiding) and Ṭibā’ (natural disposition), in that the variations of Ṭibā’, created by God, imply differences in the crafts, professions and activities a human seeks to perform towards which God directs people.⁴⁵ In other words, this variation of Ṭibā’ is not without

essential elements – Yumna al-Khuli, *aṭ-Ṭabi’iyāt Fi ‘alm al-Kalām* [Natural Sciences: Its Place in the Kalām] (Cairo: Dar aṭ-Ṭaqāfah lal naṣir wa tawzī’, 1995), 62. Since the notion of Ṭibā’ does not go against the natural causative relations played by natural laws, which are permanent and invariable, no scientific progress ever could have occurred – Albert Naṣrī Nadir, *Falsafat al-Mu’tazilah* [The Philosophy of Mu’tazilah] (al-Iskandarīyah: Maṭba‘at Dār Nashr al-Thaqāfah, 1950), vol. 1, 179. Nadir holds the Mu’tazilah’s belief in the existence of substances and accidents implies this interpretation of determinism, though they did not state it openly – Nadir, *Falsafat al-Mu’tazilah*. Despite that, some Arab scholars’ interpretations of Ṭab’ are blurred. For example, Muḥammad ‘Imārah attributes the emergence of Ṭab’ to the Mu’tazilah overemphasis on human freedom and capacity at the expense of the influences of external circumstances and motives (الواعي) – Muḥammad ‘Imārah, *Al-Mu’tazilah wa Mūshkilat al-Hūriya al-‘Insāniyah* [Mu’tazilah and the Question of Human Freedom], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār aṣ-Ṣūūrūq, 1988), 75-77. So, the notion was introduced to bring balance between these two powers (human freedom and external circumstance) in a way that Ṭab’ gives more weight to the external factors and motives. Samiḥ Dgheim, along the same lines, backed what ‘Imārah had pointed out – Samiḥ Dgheim, *Falsafat al-Qūdūr Fi Fikr al-Mu’tazilah* [Philosophy of Values in Mu’tazilah Thought] (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lūbnānī, 1992), 125. However, on examining ‘Imārah’s interpretation, one can argue there is a difference between the theological determinism (compulsionism) used by the Jabrites and the natural determinism that implies subjection to the natural matter in the way natural philosophers hold this view. Ṭab’ is a natural determinism disguised under divine determinism. That is, natural or scientific determinism is replaced by a divine one expressed onetime by Ṭab’ and another time by the notion of Tasxir.

⁴² The term literally means to constrain, compel something or somebody in the service of another (subjugation). However, here it means to render them a prepared course to follow agreeably with their desires. In other words, guidance, from God is granted to them, which expresses a positive compelling towards a good goal. Also, it has the connotation of management, furnishing and providing. It is abundant in the Qur’ān in reference to natural phenomena like the sun and moon, which are made disposed for their use, e.g. Qur’ān 7:54. The sun, moon and stars are, at his command, “made to serve [humans]” – Qur’ān 14:32-33, 16:14, 21:79, 31:20, 38:18-19, 36-38, 45:13.

⁴³ This is the idea held by an-Nazzām that God cannot enjoin what is contrary to reason or act with total disregard for the welfare of His creatures in so far as this would compromise His justice and wisdom. Fakhry, *A Short History*, 49.

⁴⁴ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā’il*, vol. 3, 243.

⁴⁵ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, vol. 1, 201-202. See also al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 208-209, where he elaborates this idea more clearly: “Someone may have a disposition (predetermination) for mathematics but not for speechmaking; for business but not for farming; another has an inclination towards cameleer’s song art or reciting poetry in a trilling, quavering, and prolonging voice, or the chanting; however, he has no disposition for singing, though all these kinds belong to music composition ...” Also in al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 175.

advantage (benefit), though people, al-Jāḥiẓ argues, are not aware of it. Among these benefits, the functionality of human society, in its broad sense, is of central importance in al-Jāḥiẓ's treatment of the Tasxir concept because "if it had not been for the differences between people, they would have disagreed and disputed among themselves over the same region, the same name and the same surname."⁴⁶ To maintain such differences, God "had favoured someone who called his son Muhammad; and favoured others using names of Satan, 'Abd Allah, and even donkey."⁴⁷ Otherwise, a state of chaos and confusion could be created "if people would not have had different reasons for choosing names and surnames" and this could lead to "the uselessness of the signs of identifying each other along with the collapse of interpersonal social transactions."⁴⁸

Tasxir is built on the Mu'tazilah's proposition of God's justice that He had created His creatures not to harm them, but to do them good. Al-Jāḥiẓ's treatment of Ṭibā' and human needs gives the impression that he unifies the concept of Ṭibā' (nature) with Tasxir (divine guide) and this confers on Ṭibā' a religious meaning. I believe the reason al-Jāḥiẓ proposed this unification was to dispel the association with the naturalists' proposition that Ṭibā' is primarily due to matter or the natural elements that have creative force. So, through this elusive and smart move, al-Jāḥiẓ manages to introduce and lay down a religious context for his notion of Ṭibā', as a modification of the naturalists'. In doing so, al-Jāḥiẓ achieves two results; the first is to successfully and appropriately propagate his interpretation of the Ṭibā' concept clothed in religious garb, and second to refute his adversaries' accusation against him of being a follower of natural philosophers. That al-Jāḥiẓ firmly believed in the role of nature in shaping our acts is based on the partial analysis I offered here and requires more in-depth study. Another related point resulting from this analysis is al-Jāḥiẓ's unification of Ṭibā' with Tasxir lead to equating Ṭibā' with the instincts in which humans and animals have a part.

From the above discussion it follows that Tasxir (divine guidance) is a disguised determinism. Briefly stated, Tasxir stands as another manifestation of this deterministic aspect in which Ṭibā' (innate disposition) is the latent (potential) power behind a person's vocation towards their craft or the literary genre in which they excel. This means, as will be explained in the next section, the existence of Ṭibā' is sufficient for a human to be creative and skilled in the art or work for which their nature prepared them, irrespective of their life conditions, experiences or any other external influences.⁴⁹

Montgomery's articles clearly show the deterministic nature of al-Jāḥiẓ's position. James E. Montgomery, "Speech and Nature: al-Jāḥiẓ, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 2.175-207, Part 2," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 1 (2009); James E. Montgomery, "Speech and Nature: al-Jāḥiẓ, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 2.175-207, Part 3," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 2 (2009); James E. Montgomery, "Speech and Nature: al-Jāḥiẓ, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 2.175-207, Part 4," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 3 (2009).

⁴⁶ al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasā'il*, 3:244-245; 273.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 17, vol. 4, 28-30; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 4, 380-381.

Ṭibāʿ and Literary Production

Recalling the section “Tasxir (التسخير): A Disguised Determinism” above, literary production is the second aspect in which Ṭibāʿ has a role in the formation of the *littérateur*, be it a poet or orator. Al-Jāḥiẓ had elaborated on this topic extensively, of which I provide, as is the case with the section of human social needs, a relatively short account focused on some theoretical points.

Al-Jāḥiẓ examined the role of Ṭibāʿ in literary production from the perspective of the creative ability of a *littérateur*. For him, the literary and artistic creations, like all other types of crafts and behaviours, are product of Ṭibāʿ. The existence of Ṭibāʿ is a prerequisite for the genuine production of art and literary works, and also for the true *littérateur*, i.e. writer/ orator.⁵⁰

Because knowledge is a necessary act occurring by nature and not attributed to man, I understand the importance and place al-Jāḥiẓ assigned to Ṭibāʿ in the formation of the orator, in particular. Al-Jāḥiẓ made this explicit: whoever knows something, he does so by his nature and not through a process of learning or God creates that knowledge for him. In addition, al-Jāḥiẓ drives home this point saying

what the nature produces voluntarily, without restrictions, although its ways of expression are not prolific, the self receives this production lavishly (generously) and admirably; and listeners find it more meaningful than much of that comes out of toiling and labouring.⁵¹

As a consequence of his extreme and excessive emphasis on the role of Ṭabʿ in the literary production, al-Jāḥiẓ left no room for external environmental factors. That is, his belief in the concept of Ṭibāʿ led him to eliminate the role of external influences – in particular, environmental ones.⁵² Within that is included the role of events and happenings that a society passes through, despite their role of being a trigger or impulse for speech making. Al-Jāḥiẓ, in drawing this conclusion, believed only Ṭibāʿ is sufficient, as an independent faculty, enabling or pushing its possessor to a type of production that suits them.⁵³ Consequently, al-Jāḥiẓ

⁵⁰ al-Jāḥiẓ mentions Abū Dāʾūd Ibn Ḥarīz al-Iyādī's definition of rhetoric “the Ṭabʿ is head of rhetoric, whose backbone is training, its wing is transmitting others discourses; its ornament is the correct vocalization; its glimmer is selection of the appropriate words” – al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 44. The semantic indication of ‘head’ is highly evident as compared to other acquired features and devices the definition enumerates. Relevant to that is the epistle of Biṣr bin al-Muʿtamir – al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 135-138.

⁵¹ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 28-29.

⁵² Despite that, al-Jāḥiẓ acknowledges, in many instances, the environmental influence on living creatures' inclinations, human and animals. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 291; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 4, 70-74; al-Jāḥiẓ, *ar-Rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 63, vol. 2, 312-313.

⁵³ Ihsān ʿAbbās explains it as: al-Jāḥiẓ's opinion almost contradicts Ibn Sallām's view – Ihsān ʿAbbās, *Tāriḫ al-Naqd al-ʿAdabī ʿAnda al-ʿArab: naqd Aṣīr Min al-Qarn at-Tān ī Ḥata al-Qarn at-Tā at-Tāmin al-Hijrī* [History of the Literary Criticism of the Arabs: Poetry Criticism from the Second Hīgra Century till the Eighth] (Beirut: Muʿasasat ar-Risālah, 1983), 96-97. Ibn Sallām, a contemporary of al-Jāḥiẓ, believes that external factors, in particular events of peace and war, play a crucial role. Another aspect of this point is associated with the poet's personal experience. An example is Ibn Sallām's consideration of the difference between Jamil ibn Maʿmar (d. 701) and Kuṭayyir ʿAzzah (d. 723), and the appraisal of al-Jāḥiẓ between Jarir and Firazdaq – Rāḍī, *Al-ʿAb ʿād al-Falsafiyah*, 315-316. Based on that, Jamil's true love experience was behind his distinction (excellence) from the other poet; meanwhile, Kuṭayyir, being loquacious and of false feelings, was the reason behind his low rank in love poetry. Against this position, al-Jāḥiẓ, to support his assumption of innate disposition, argues that “al-Farazdaq, who had so many love affairs with women, had said nothing in erotic poetry; meanwhile, Jarir produced the most amatory poems, although he had never fallen in love with any woman” – al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 208-209.

abolished the concept that art reflects an experience the artist goes through and this shows again the reason a poet stands out in one genre and not the other is attributed only to *Tibā'*. In a nutshell, creative production is a skill that enables its possessor to accomplish distinction by virtue of his *Tibā'*; the artist becomes a creator whose creative production does not depend on a motive or experience to drive them to produce.

The other point of the role of *Tibā'* in literary production pertains to the question of extemporaneity in speechmaking (oratory), a characteristic of a naturally gifted orator. For al-Jāḥiẓ, extemporaneity in its basic sense means people in making speech do not use reflection and deliberation in the first place; a skill that is not based on a previous resource of knowledge of any kind, whether written or orally transmitted traditions (full of normative criteria). This is exactly the case with Arab orators, al-Jāḥiẓ stated. That is, extemporaneity characterises the naturally disposed Arab orators. Everything, for an Arab, he argued, is carried out naturally and spontaneously, without prior preparation, as if it was a revelation in which there is no effort, suffering, deliberation (consultation) nor dependence on experience of previous people.

As soon as the Arab musters their thoughts more vigorously to deliver a speech, the meanings begin to flow in groups and the sentences follow to descend in hordes. Moreover, since the Arabs were illiterate, naturally endowed with speechmaking, they did not record their discourses (in books) nor teach it to their descendants. They simply memorised that which touched their hearts artlessly and attached to their breasts and connected to their minds without affectation.⁵⁴

What they know is by nature much the same as they speak naturally. It is because knowledge is necessary; as such, it happens without acquisition and deliberation. Therefore, Arabs are not affected nor do they depend, in their speechmaking, on the speeches previously written down nor do they closely observe the established rules of the craftsmanship of oratory, as is the case with others, in particular the Persians. Al-Jāḥiẓ says in this regard,

every discourse of the Persians, and consequently every (meaningful) notion of the non-Arabs, is based on, and produced after, extensive deliberation, industrious contemplation and long aloneness, as well as the consultation of books, in such a way that the discourse of a second author is a reflection of an previous 'first' one, and the accretion (accumulation) of a third one is already existent in the discourse of the second one insofar as these ideas are shown, and included, in the works of latter authors.⁵⁵

Al-Jāḥiẓ's theological beliefs, as a Mu'tazilite, influenced his literary opinions and views. Among these are the concepts of *Ṭab'* and *Tibā'* (innate dispositions) that al-Jāḥiẓ employed in his various writings to interpret the formation of the *littérateur* and his literary production. Viewed within al-Mu'tazilah's elaboration of the 'generated acts,' these concepts of *Ṭab'* and *Tibā'* suggest a type of determinism. This determinism is completely opposed to the doctrine of human free will, which is closely associated with the concept of God's justice. To break away from such a contradiction, al-Jāḥiẓ appealed for the concept of God's guidance (*Tasxir*).

⁵⁴ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 28.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

However, the meaning of Tasxir points to a natural determinism disguised under divine determinism.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, this study provided only an outline of the concepts of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' that al-Jāḥiẓ employed in interpreting his literary opinions. Below are the main points the study managed to present satisfactorily.

The concepts of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' arose from the Mu'tazilah discussion of the generated acts (effects). Central to the generated acts is the responsibility of the individual for their acts; a point interpreted within the domain of belief in God's justice and belief in His absolute sovereignty. The Mu'tazilah sought through these concepts to relieve God from committing vices and injustices, and finally safeguard the absolute sovereignty of God without scarifying His justice.

The frequent use of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' terms in al-Jāḥiẓ's writings reflects the position they had in presenting his views. The frequencies are: Ṭab' 38 times, Ṭibā' 47 times, Ṭabāi 54 times and Ṭabi'a 73 times. Al-Jāḥiẓ's interpretation is based on that all acts of humans, except for the will, occur by Ṭab' and Ṭibā' (naturally). The questions of belief and knowledge are the two domains in which Ṭab' and Ṭibā' unfold their implications. Knowledge is coded (represented) in the formation of the *littérateur* (poet/orator) and their literary production (poetry/oratory). Al-Jāḥiẓ thus excluded the effects of external factors (including personal experience and emotions).

The study believes al-Jāḥiẓ used the Tasxir, pregnant with religious nuances, to avoid the association of Ṭab' and Ṭibā' with natural philosophy. In essence, Ṭibā' and Tasxir express a type of determinism understood as natural or scientific. But, for al-Jāḥiẓ, they both are derived from a Divine source. Hence, natural (or scientific) determinism is turned into Divine determinism, a disguised determinism despite the lengthy digressions al-Jāḥiẓ made to escape it.

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